

“Nation-building and the Dynamics of Silences, Memory and Forgetting”

(Brief report)

This workshop was organized by Elena Soler under the auspices of the V4 Net and with the support of Charles University in Prague. Due to adverse trends in Corona-virus infections, plans to stage a hybrid event had to be dropped. All presentations took place online.

The main purpose of this meeting was to bring together scholars from leading academic centres in the V4 region (but not exclusively), and from different branches of anthropology (cognitive, linguistic, political, psychological etc.) and adjacent fields to investigate comparatively to what extent the concept of long-term silence (or deep silence), like other processes of memory and forgetting, can serve as a useful analytical category in the study of nation-building, in wider contexts of Europeanization and globalization.

The initial goals of the workshop (see the CfP and programme) were amply fulfilled.

The twenty two participants hailed mostly from Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic but also Germany, the UK and Norway. Seven thematic panels and a total of seventeen papers offered a rich variety of ethnographic material and analysis covering issues such as: the political instrumentalization of silences in connection with official heritage, commemorations, memorials, national myths and rituals; silences in intergroup boundary processes; intergenerational family secrecy and strategic silences; organized silencing in the Academy; silences and emotions; and the relationships between nation-making (and its attempt to give an image of a unified community), minorities and silencing. Discussion focused on teasing out the identities (ethnic, religious etc.) of the carriers of both old silences and new ones, as well as their respective substantive foundations. The upshot was a very insightful, collaborative and pleasant collegial academic event.

The workshop established that attention to silences (with their different dynamics, temporalities, domains, meanings, uses and abuses, contested and/or broken) can enable a better understanding of how nations have been (and are still being) built in the V4 region and also illuminate significant challenges facing Europe and the world. Because as Frances Pine stated, epitomizing the message of the workshop (as noted by Anna Malewska-Szałygyin): “Silence is more about remembering than forgetting”.

The convenor is in discussion with paper-givers to move forward to an edited volume, either as a special issue of a journal or in book format.

Elena Soler

Prague, 28th October 2020